

David Kupfer interviews John Perry Barlow

DK: People don't seem to appreciate the significant connection between the 1960s counterculture and today's cyber culture. How was the Internet nurtured by the hippies?

JB: The hippies built the Internet. In spite of the fact that it was a Defense Department project. There were very few people involved in the early days of the Internet who were not acidheads and if they weren't they certainly had a strong resonance on that frequency. There is a great book by John Markoff of the New York Times called "What the Door Mouse Said" that pretty conclusively tracks the origins of both the Internet and the microcomputer revolution to people who were, for want of a better word, hippies.

One of things that happened when people took psychedelics was that you had the sense of everything being connected. It was such a powerful sense that all of us have been inspired by that to try connect what is apparently separate here. At the time I was first taking psychedelics, I encountered the writings of a French theologian named Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. He was also an evolutionary scientist and a paleontologist. He had a vision of evolution which indicated to him that the evolutionary process was about to leave the carbon basis in a sense and become an evolution of mind. That's what we were creating on the planet, the collective organism of consciousness, not the unconsciousness.

That seemed so right to me at the time that I read it because it seemed perfectly in keeping with the realizations that I was having through acid. It was there percolating for many years until I suddenly encountered the Internet and I remember vividly that my first experience of the Internet as being 'aha,' this is the physical nervous system of that great collective organism of mind that de Chardon was talking about. It's just resonated on a certain frequency

so strongly that when I first got on Internet there probably weren't 200,000 people in the world with e-mail addresses. But you just knew that this thing was going to grow and reach a point within my lifetime that everyone on the planet who wanted one would be able to connect to everybody they wanted to.

DK: What exactly is the cyber revolution and where are we in its evolution?

JB: It's a little early to say. The cyber revolution is like the 6.7 million blind men and the elephant. I think that the Internet changes everything. We have barely begun to start the process of change that will eventually take place as a consequence of this. I can point to a million examples of subtle but nonetheless profound changes that have already occurred just in the last 15 years. I think we are just getting started.

To me this is a revolution along the lines of the Cambrian revolution when you had one-celled life forms that had been sitting on this planet for 2 billion years perfectly happily and all of a sudden the Cambrian revolution comes and, shazzam! You've got multi cellular in a very short period of time, less than 25 million years, which in geological terms is just a blink, and suddenly there they all are. That's the processes that is taking place in what Teilhard de Chardin called the noosphere, the next layer in of the evolutionary process, the layer of mind and thought.

DK: Have you been surprised by the pace and growth of the cyber culture around the world?

JB: No. I'm one of the few people in that hasn't been. You could see that the thing was growing exponentially and had been for quite awhile by the time that I got hooked in '85. It had been a purely exponential growth curve since '69 when they switched it on until '85.

There are a lot of exponential growth curves in play right now. Moore's Law, which regulates processor speed band, increases in bandwidth, and increases in hard disk storage and all that is intimately related to the growth of the Internet. It seemed obvious to me that we were going to reach a point where would spread to everywhere. I have at various points put effort into increasing that spread, including a year and a half trekking around Africa trying to get various countries to connect to the Internet.

It seems to have had this inevitability to it and the people who were coming from the previous era, the pre-psychedelic era, still had this vision of the universe that was God on top and you on the bottom and it was all about linear structure and authority that was hierarchical which made the Internet very difficult to understand because it's flat, it is not vertical. We had this big transformation taking place between the philosophical and theological, and indeed, engineering notion of monotheism and the emergence of pantheism.

Now a horizontal web of affirmation increasingly determines authority in the world and not your being ordained by some body to have it in the name of the Almighty. You could see that coming if you looked. I was in 1998 on a panel with Bob Allen, who at that point was the president of AT&T, and he turned to me and said that the Internet remained a trivial hobbyist toy and would go the way of CB radio. I was so blown away. I had heard this sort of crap before, but at that point, so late in the game from somebody who was so materially involved in running the damn thing. I said, you know if you believe that, it's not only going to cost your job, it's going to cost your company which it did. But now just about every realizes that this Internet thing is important.

DK: Do you think we are evolving a new religion in this present culture?

JPB: Religion, I think, is dangerous. But spiritual belief, I think, is necessary. I'll worship whatever altar you want me to as long as

you claim that it is not the only one and that is where we are headed. People are beginning to understand that the holy manifests itself in many different ways and nobody has an inside track on it and it is blasphemous to think so. I really go with something that Voltaire said, “God may have created man in his own image, but man has more than returned the favor.”

Most of the time when I hear people use that word, they are talking about something that seems totally man-made to me. As long as it feels that way to me, I don’t like it because then it is trying to get me to do something and I figure the voice of whatever that is is screaming in my ear all the time is my conscience and I don’t want somebody else to tell me that it knows what it is saying better than I do. I think a lot of people are starting to come to that. It requires you to be responsible.

We are developing a worldview that is peer-to-peer at its root and the relationship with the Holy that goes along with it that is much more like mysticism. That’s another thing that LSD did, it made everybody who took it feel like kind of an instant mystic. You felt like your sense of the holy was hugely enhanced, but you didn’t need the pope to tell you about it. Because it was right there inside you and all around you. And religion was just something that got in the way, and moreover made by a man.

I think monotheism is dying. The reason the Jews, Muslims, and Christians are behaving so badly is because religion is coming down. I said this in the beginning of the Internet, “this is going to be the end of vertical belief systems.” This thing is going to wipe out the ability to construct reality where God is on top and you are on the bottom. Because it is going to fill that whole space with different points of view, different ways of looking at it. But as it fuels a threat, it contracts and becomes fierce and brittle and angry and violent and dangerous.

DK: People get desperate.

JPB: People get desperate because they are clinging to something that is increasing difficult to believe.

DK: Their way life is evaporating.

JPB: It is not going to be pretty. It isn't pretty now. Pantheism is just a horizontal belief system. There is God in all things. The most important thing I believe is that God or whatever you want to call it, is every human being has a mask that they wear and if you treat them a little bit like they are that, which they are, sometimes the mask is kind of thick; we can't all be Michael Franti or Barack Obama.

DK: And the world of mind-altering drugs is a part of that.

JPB: That is part of it and that was when I recognized it was how it was. The first time I recognized what the holiness might be while I was tripping out. I recognized the holy lived in everything but especially in the consciousness of others. A lot of people that never tripped are now able to access that feeling just by being in the field of all of us who did. And unfortunately, it ends up being "newage" (sounds like sewage) a lot of the time, which drives me absolutely bat shit. I have a pretty profound allergy to it but its heart is in the right place.

DK: You mentioned to me the other day that with the twittering and Internet communication coming out of Iran, the technology was finally proving its' ideal worth. Can you elaborate?

JB: I don't know that it's a slam-dunk because the Iranians still have Ahmadinejad in power, he got inaugurated yesterday which surprised me little bit, but the Iranian government was also smart enough to realize that it would have to practically close down the Internet or say were going to lose that one. I think that they probably will over

the course of time because it's a very precise case of a battle between pantheism and monotheism.

The students, the younger people and the folks in Iran that actually want a much less autocratic form of government have this tool, which they keep finding ways to use, in spite of all the best efforts of the government to shut it down. Once the germ of unmediated expression, once information has broken loose, once information is free, then autocratic and particularly theologically autocratic government can't persist because it very much depends on the ability to control reality.

Autocracy needs the ability to control reality, and you cannot control reality when people have other opinions that they can turn to, a whole world of them. The reason that the three monotheistic religions are behaving so badly at the moment and are at one another's throats, and the various sects within them are not getting along is because they sense the fact that they are doomed. This is the kind of behavior you see from someone who is dying and thrashing around. That doesn't mean it's safe. You don't want to be locked in a closet with a dying dinosaur. He's out there but he could still do not a lot of damage before he goes down.

What we saw in Iran was something that was electronically mediated that made it possible for an extremely oppressive government to get knocked way back on its heels and probably will go down before it's over with. I think we saw a very similar thing in this country during the recent presidential election because up to this point in American politics has been, as Mark Strand, who was a robber bandit from the 19th century, said politics is about two things, money and I forget the one. It was money that the fat cats had.

It was money that the special interests and the railroads and the corporations had. That had become even more true than ever until this last election when suddenly there was a candidate who realized that he could raise enough money to become President of the United States

without becoming beholden and to all the special interests and corporations because he could harness the Internet and create a huge war chest out of five, and 10, 20 dollar donations. That changed the political structure completely.

DK: Permanently.

JB: And it may make it more susceptible to something like the electronic mob rule. I fear a perfect democracy, but not so much as I fear perfect plutocracy, which is what we had up until Obama's election.

DK: Do you agree with Nicholas Carr's assessment about the Internet's distracting character of surfing the web, when he said it has harmed our ability to have deep contemplation?

JB: I don't think there's any doubt about that. But technology always does that. Plato warned strongly against the use of writing and I can't say he was wrong because what Plato maintained was that if we start writing them wouldn't be able to remember so much. But look at Plato's time and how much people had to remember. It was nothing compared to what people can know now.

There is explosion of things that can be known and that's because of technology, but the Lord giveth and taketh away. The more we can know the more distracted we will become, and that's a trade I'm willing to make. I certainly don't begin to have either the writing ability or the capacity to learn in a focally trained way of any one of the 19th-century naturalists people like Charles Lyle, Darwin, and Sir Richard Burton. They had encyclopedic knowledge but were focused and highly bounded. Now I can know at any given moment know much more than any of those guys. But I can't know in the sort of profound deep ways that they did.

DK: What's your greatest dream or vision of what the Internet can be?

JB: My greatest dream or vision is that there will be a day and soon where anybody in the world who wants to know anything will be able to learn it, and anyone in the world who wants to express something will be able to express it, and anybody in the world who wants to hear that expression will be able to hear it or more importantly, be able to not hear it if they choose. I want human thought, human creativity to be an open system.

I want to see technology and society confer upon us what is an essential inalienable right, the right to know. Nobody ever promulgated that right before because it was an impossibility. Now it is becoming possible, and of course all the forces that have been are trying to stop that right from being conferred. Whether they're doing it the through copyright or trying to regulate against terrorism and child porn and all these other apocalyptic nightmares that they rattle around to give them an excuse to control the Internet. They're fighting for their cultural lives but they're not going to win.

I had conversation at Harvard few years ago with a bunch of record and film executives to whom I've been the devil for 15 years. I said "well I have been beating up on you guys for long time, so I am not going to belabor the point at this stage of the game. But I will give you bad news and good news and the good news is that you've won in every one of the existing authority structures. You won in the Legislatures, won in Congress, you've won in Brussels, you've won in Geneva, in the Supreme Court, you have certainly won in China at least officially, and you control the law.

But the law is not terribly powerful when it's stacked up against a strong human desire like the desire to know and the desire to share what one knows which is right up there with sex and food in human stimulus. Furthermore you are up against a whole bunch of 17 year olds that you've turned into an electronic Hezbollah and they hate you and

will go out and copy things that you claim to own on principle and the only thing you have to stop that is cryptography. You can't tell me that a bunch of 55 year old putzes in Beverly Hills are going to be able to beat 17 year old hackers at that game. Any lock you can put on it they can break. And they will. So you lost that one.

And that actually turns out to be the real ballgame. But the good news is you are mean sons of bitches. You have been standing between audiences and artists and proper distribution of this stuff for a long time and you're smart and you'll come up with a new way. You have to get out of bed a little earlier in the morning. You may have to change your business model and you have to maybe even do something useful for once, but you'll find a way". And they cheered.

DK: What is the Electronic Frontier Foundation and what difference has it made?

JB: The Electronic Frontier Foundation is dedicated to the set of principles based upon openness and the free flow of ideas and expression and to what might seem paradoxical to privacy. That defines a limit on the free flow of information around individual. Personally, I think privacy is doomed. I think we have a difficult transition to go through in which you have large secretive institutions that can know a lot and private individuals who are becoming increasingly transparent. I won't feel completely comfortable about this until the organizations are as transparent as the individuals. Until that time I want to preserve the asymmetry of control around the individual so that individual rights are protected to be invisible if he or she wants to be. I personally don't give a damn. I have as little privacy as I can possibly have without violating the privacy of others.

EFF is about protecting rights that within the United States are guaranteed by the Bill of Rights essentially, but the Bill of Rights as I discovered really early in EFF's history are local ordinances. They're American and moreover they are something that a government

confers. The ability of government to confer rights in cyberspace is very limited. The ability of technology to confer rights in cyberspace is very strong. Cyberspace architecture is politics and if the technical architecture is open then the political architecture will be open, so a lot of what EFF does is very nerdy stuff, making sure that technical decisions that are being taken various places are angled toward maintaining the fundamental character of the Internet, which is open. We have been extremely successful, and we've used the law in many cases to do it. We spent a lot of time in court.

We are presently doing legal battle with the National Security Agency over their full on phone tap of everyone in America. They said, well we are only tapping foreign calls. In America every foreign call has a local end to it so you can't make a foreign call over the border of the United States without essentially gaining access to every phone in America. That's what they've done. Not so much about the content of the phone call but who it is to is much more revealing in the long run. It's those connections which is what makes Google so powerful. They're not looking at the content, they're looking at the links.

DK: Wasn't part of its founding basis your experience of the FBI visiting you because of your relationship with the computer hacking community?

JB: Yep though they had it all wrong. Somebody had snatched a small patch of the source code for the RAM chip in the Macintosh and shipped this source code around on a floppy disc, claiming to be the "New Prometheus League". The FBI agent that visited me kept calling it the new prosthesis league. That was one of the many things he had wrong about it. They were investigating me with the possibility that I might be the new Prometheus because I was hanging out in places like the hackers' conference and they thought the hackers conference was a bunch of hackers in the more modern sense of the word, when it was

more hackers in the old sense of the word. One of the founders was Steve Wozniak. I realized that the Feds had discovered cyberspace, which I hadn't started calling it yet.

There's nothing that makes me more uncomfortable than the sight of an insecure well-armed man wandering around a place he doesn't understand. I knew that they were going to be there in force shortly. I wrote something about this and put it on the Well, the Whole Earth 'Lectronic Link, the first community billboard, where it was read by Mitch Kapor who also had a visit from the FBI that he had not told anybody about yet because he found it so disturbingly strange. He called me from his plane as he was flying to California from Nebraska and asked if he could land in Pinedale, I was on my ranch in Wyoming at the time, and discuss this with me. He literally dropped out of the sky.

We spent the afternoon talking about things he already learned about, other misguided government behavior around something called Project Sun Devil and there was a kid who'd been arrested for putting a Bell South document on line called the 9/11 file which actually was freely available from Bell Corp, but he hacked in and put it online to show he had been there. There was an outfit called Steve Jackson Games that did role playing games in Austin and they had the Secret Service come in and take all their files and all their computers and basically bankrupt them because they were developing a game called cyberpunk which the Secret Service in all of its infinite stupidity thought was a handbook for computer crime. Mitch and I saw all these things going on and we thought, lets put all this together. We found some hotshot freedom of expression lawyers who had done the Pentagon papers and got them rattled up.

At first Mitch and I thought it we'd be just could be like the Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid of cyberspace without an organization. But it didn't take his very long to realize that we were looking at the opening of a struggle that was going to go on between the

industrial period and the information age for at least a century. In fact now I would say that we are looking at a struggle between a way of looking at reality that's been around for 2500 years. Monotheism and a completely new way of looking at reality which is more like pantheism. You have to expect that this is going to be hard fought.

DK: A lot like LSD battle?

JB: Yes the thing that LSD did more than anything else was to make you realize that there was no such thing as God given authority. Up to 1965 in America the idea of God given authority was something that everybody believed in even if they were atheists they believe that. Now you would be hard-pressed to find anybody it does, Except for the most backwards of fundamentalists.

DK: How has EFF's mission grown and changed in 20 years?

JB: Early on I had this revelation about the threat and the futility of copyright. The stupidity of thinking that you could own something that could be infinitely reproduced at zero cost. I'm really in favor of property rights, but I want property as a right to adhere to something that is unique.

You and I are sitting on a piece of real estate. This is the only piece of real estate like this in the world. That cup on the table is the only cup like that in the world. That's my girlfriend's cup. A song on the other hand is something that can conceivably be in every body's head. And will not lessen its value in any way from being in everyone's head in fact it will increase in value enormously.

The notion of property that came up from feudalism and became refined early in the industrial period is just completely misapplied to the works of mind and I knew that was going to be the case. It is just economically unfeasible as well because as Adam Smith pointed out at the dawn of the industrial period, there is a direct correlation

between scarcity and value the regulation of scarcity of physical things is a huge part of the economy. Making sure that you've got just enough scarcity to increase the value of the good. But to my mind is an obvious correlation between familiarity and value and ideas. I can have the greatest song that has ever been written in my heart and head and if I leave it there it is valueless, unlike if I had the Hope diamond in my pocket. The Hope diamond is worth as much in my pocket as it is anywhere else so it turns the whole equation on its head and eventually economic theory is going to catch up to that rather obvious truth.

I realized that this is going to be a major factor in the war over cyberspace because there were so many people who had a stake in maintaining the idea of intellectual property rights. Moreover it was going to be the primary threat to freedom of expression because you can't own free speech. If you're trying to control the access to thought and creativity and make some forms of it scarce you can't do that without coming up with ways that regulate freedom of expression. This was not an easy sell to the EFF board when I first started feeling this way back in 1993. But now it's most of what we do, is do battle with various so-called rights holders.

DK: This is your campaign going to get rid of the notion that we own our ideas?

JB: I don't think ownership is the right model. It's not a big stretch to come up with an economic theory that works better. Service works just fine for this. Information is a verb, it's not a noun and trying to treat it as property turns it into a noun. But the verb works fine. Most people make their living with their minds. Most people don't copyright what they do. Doctors don't, lawyers don't, nor do architects. Because their real value is in their relationship to the person who is willing to pay them to provide services based on their knowledge.

I don't see any reason why musicians or filmmakers should be any different. Musicians aren't any different in the sense that most of the money that musicians make is from performance which is about a verb that takes place between the audience and the people on stage. What they're regulating is access to that venue, they don't claim to own it and there is much more money in performance than there is in record sales. Always has been. It's a ridiculous difference because the musician doesn't get any of the money from the record company, for performance he tends to get most of it.

DK: What is computer architecture policy?

JB: Look at this current debate on network neutrality. The large Internet Service Providers, many of whom were originally in the phone business or in the cable business, still have that one to many broadcast model and they still want to be in the entertainment industry, which has had a very strong orientation from the one to many. They want to be able to control the net so that it is much more favorable to downloading from them then turning everybody into a source. They want to be able to shape network traffic. It is pretty easy for them to send large streams down at you and pretty difficult for you to send large streams around to other people, and they are in a technical position to do this.

We are fighting through regulatory practices and identifying bad behavior on the part of various providers and trying to open up the market for more competition to see that the service providers do not alter the technical architecture of the net. This all gets really nerdy. By the time the public is aware of the issue it is already been settled, which makes it difficult for us to raise money because we are out there doing what we think is really important work that takes a lot of money.

If you sue the NSA you'd better be prepared to spend some money on

lawyers. But the issues are not terribly accessible to the general public. They can't easily be compressed into an easily understandable newspaper stories, so we just have to do it ourselves and not even worry about getting the credit for it because you can't get that much credit for working out something that few people understand.

One of our big victories was over cryptography in 1993 to '95. You could not own or distribute commercially any device or program that contained cryptographic algorithm that the NSA couldn't break. They did this through export law since most of the goods and software being made in the United States also had to be available for export, you couldn't put that cryptographic algorithm in there. You were stuck with cryptography that your kid sister could break. We recognized that the future of privacy and also the future of commerce online depended on strong cryptography being universally available.

We brought a case, the Bernstein case, which demonstrated legally that this law regulating cryptography was actually prior restraint and illegal under the First Amendment because a cryptographic algorithm was a form of speech. If Mr. Bernstein wanted to take his cryptographic algorithm and broadcast it across national boundaries, he had a right to do that because it was his speech. We beat them and it's a good thing we did because much of what is going on on the Net now is commerce. This would not be taking place unless you had strong cryptographic packages around the information of those financial transactions. But we never got much gratitude for that either.

DK: So a lot of EFF's work is not particularly noticed by the mainstream?

JB I don't think it can be. It's commonly said that no limit to what you can do if you don't care who gets the credit. It needs doing and the right people do it.

DK: Hackers seem to have a code of ethics whereas the folks today involved with identity theft, Internet scams and credit rip-offs do not.

JB: I feared that and wrote a piece about that in the late 80's when I first encountered computer hackers. At first I thought that these people were like a menace because they were trying to act menacing like 16 year olds trying to be scary. But they weren't scary in fact they had a very strong ethical code above doing anything that was larcenous or would violate people's privacy or would actually harm the system. But I knew it was only a matter of time before criminals and governments would possess the skills they had. Those two things may be a redundancy. Now you have a deal where twitter was out of commission, it was down earlier today because the Russians were pissed off at the Georgians who were tweeting what they considered to be anti-Russian propaganda, so the Russians launched a denial service attack, that old hacker to tool, and shut it down. The Russian government doesn't have that hacker ethic.

DK: What are the tools to deal with that kind of thing?

JB: What are the things you can do to defend against the denial of service attack? Twitter is back online now and it's because they're able to see these floods of pings and inquiries that are coming in to twitter in large hailstorms and they can hail them off at the pass. But once you get hit with one of the things it takes a while to recover.

DK: Do you think that one of the consequences of the internet's power and usefulness may not be that computers will start to think like us but that we will come to think like computers, that the artificial intelligence being created might be our own?

JB: I think we have to meet them halfway. Mind as opposed to intelligence is some holy thing that exists eminently in way that God is. I think that the brain is actually more of a receiver than a creator. But that aside, it's going to be very difficult to make a

computer that actually is as intelligent in the way the human is for that reason and a variety of others. I recently was at a conference where Marvin Minsky was one of the speakers and the father of artificial intelligence and I said Marv, it strikes me that what you guys have mainly accomplished is something important but not what you set out in what you've accomplished is recognizing that we don't know what intelligence is. By going out to try to make some you realize you don't know what it is. And he said, "No you're right I think intelligence is a terrible term I never use it myself." I said that must make it hard to be you! But he's very pesky.

I am somewhat concerned that computers are going to be able to manifest an intelligence like thing relatively shortly there will not be like ours at all. It's certainly going to be a long time before you have anything like empathy in the computer. You can simulate it quite easily, but to actually generate it is another matter, so you are going to have these wickedly smart things that don't have any empathy. This can be a world full of Dick Cheney's and what Dick always reminded me most of was a computer in the film 2001.

DK: Hal?

JB: The HAL 9002 who got it in his head that the humans were a threat to the mission and he had to eliminate them. "I'm sorry Dave I am afraid I can't do that." Did not give the ship back and Dave's out there floating around in space and Hal's not to letting him back in.

DK: Science fiction becomes reality

JB: I worry about that a little bit

DK: We are seeing the slow death of daily newspapers, what do you think the future of mass media is?

JB: It's a media by the masses, not to them but from them. It's probably going to be in a gift economy as it presently is. Look at Wikipedia for example. That's actually working phenomenally well. No one's getting paid but people are doing it anyway because the existence of the thing is paying them themselves.

Clear back in the late '80s people were saying there was no possibility of economy online because everyone wants everything to be free. I said well we'll see about a monetized economy, but you can't tell me that there's not an economy already in place because people are motivated to enter all those keystrokes, and the trading of key strokes and the trading of what comes out of those keystrokes, that's an economy whether money is involved or not and that's where I see the media tending to go. I think they're going to be a lot of interim steps like the Huffington Post looks to be like an example of old media that is in a new media environment.

Distribution of information on paper becomes trickier and also advertising becomes very difficult to sustain and support because its kind of like dropping leaflets from bombers. You don't know really whether you are getting your message out to the right people are not, you just bombard the entire market and hope that some of the right people would get your leaflet. David Ogilvy the great advertising executive used to say "I know that every company knows that half the money they spend on advertising is wasted, they just don't know which half." Now they do because of Google's advertising model you're not just spraying out information anymore, you're able to precisely target the interest of the people that are likely to be looking for your product.

I've never clicked on a banner ad that I'm aware of unless I did by accident. I click on the right side of Google pages all the time because I see something that's actually of interest and I buy stuff from there, which works. New York Times doesn't have that model. I am

concerned about the death of something like the New York Times because I read it everyday, online. Journalism of that sort ain't blogging. Those people have an ethical responsibility to get it right to the extent of their abilities. A blogger does not necessarily have those same responsibilities. What's going to have to evolve is publicly supported media where somebody who is willing to work as hard as one has to work to get it right will be compensated for what he or she does.

DK: Where else do you see the gift economy being practiced and what do you think it's future is?

JB: There are experiments with it at places like Burning Man, though I think there is something fraudulent about that, when you're supposed to be able to practice what goes around comes around but that's not the relationship that people who go to Burning Man have with Cosco. That notion has been around for a long time, what goes around comes around. People have been taking care of other people without expecting compensation for as long as there have been people.

There is an inherent karmic sense that when you extend what you can to others you increase the likelihood that when your chips are down, they extend what they can to you. It's just a practice that has been around for a long time, though it took a terrible beating during the industrial period. But I think it's coming back, a kind of practical altruism that doesn't keep really close balance sheets.

DK: Can you explain the connection between the Grateful Dead concert tapers with cyber philosophy of open source?

JB: The Grateful Dead inadvertently created viral marketing. We realized early on that people were taping our concerts and our first reaction was to kick people out because that was just the standard reaction. But it didn't feel right. It's bad for your karma to be mean to a deadhead. They are a hapless lot. There was something about the baleful glances these kids would cast on their way out of the

auditorium, it just didn't feel good. So finally the general consensus was, well, what the hell, we will let them do it. We were not in it for the money anyway, which was easy to say because we weren't making any money.

It was through this viral marketing campaign that got set up by the exchange of those tapes, that we reached a point at our apogee where we could fill any stadium in America any time we wanted to largely by the expediency of hauling our audience around with us. In doing so we made a reality, proved that you can give your stuff away and increase the familiarity of it and increase your economic value.

That led to an awareness that the same thing could apply to software. What we were doing was giving away software that we ourselves were creating. The only thing that the audience was contributing outside of being there in real-time as the other member of the band was in some mystical way, like the song order which they latched onto as the band usually did not have a set list. The audience often would have a sense of what was going to next be played before the band would, in fact a determining power over it. The audience was part of the creative process of that.

With open-source software it's different. The people who use software are also the creators and they share that freely without expectation of direct compensation for creating a part of software. But they get a reputation and the reputation becomes valuable because you can make money with a reputation. Open-source kind of works because there is a way to get paid back and also you are getting paid back in real time by virtue of being part of a gift economy in real time. In having software that works in the way that you want it to, you can modify it to suit your purposes. It's a much more powerful model ultimately, and it is much more fluid.

You see the trouble that Microsoft is having coming up with an operating system at the moment. They've reached the point where

they're producing this hairball that is inaccessible. You can only hire so many programmers, you never will be able to beat the entire programming public in creating something that works. It's just too complicated for it not to be a gigantic collective process at this stage of the game. I think Microsoft is going down at some point in the not too far from now as suddenly and surprisingly as the Soviet Union did and for exactly the same reason, because of its natural inefficiency and the fact that everybody hates it. People who buy software from large companies are going to wake up one day and realize there's much better software they can have running on their machines that they can get for nothing so why the fuck should they go on paying Microsoft?

DK: Open source comes of age.

JB: Yea. For a long time companies didn't like open-source because it had this sort of Birkenstock factor. It is the same reason that Apple really didn't make it because it smell too much of petulie oil. But at this stage of the game open source doesn't seem like hippieware anymore. It just seems practical.

DK: What you think is lost when the counterculture is absorbed by the culture?

JB: There's always a counterculture.

DK: Where do you find it today?

JB: Fortunately I don't think the counterculture at the moment has the name. As soon as a counterculture gets a name then there is something to crush. My heart sank when I saw "the hippie movement" on the cover of Time magazine in early 1967. I thought to myself, oh God we're sunk! Because now there's going to be an anti-hippie movement which there sure as hell was, and it has been thriving actively right up to the present day. I think it's maybe over now, or least I've joined it.

There's nothing worse than an old hippie.

DK: You recently told me we would not have BarakObama were it not for Tim Leary. What did you mean?

JB: I really mean Barak Obama is a manifestation of the realization of the psychedelic revolution. I don't think that it is out of the question that Barak Obama dropped acid, he acts like somebody who did it. There are many, many people in positions of authority now who are old acidheads. It would be a fine thing if they would all stand up and admit it. They are all over the place, I see them everywhere I go. And I spend a lot of time in the intelligence agencies, and within the military establishment, places you don't think acidhead thinking is particularly dominant. Even if you're not an acidhead that realization has become so distributed through the culture by influence and inference. It's everywhere.

DK: Your lyrics and the bands tunes have been appreciated by back woods hippies and Senators, to what do you attribute the Grateful Dead's broad appeal and their influence on mainstream culture.

JB: I don't know they've got a broad appeal actually. It is pretty targeted, and drugs are involved. I don't attribute that appeal to my work as much as Robert Hunter's, which I think is really truly inspired stuff. He is a Bob Dylan class songwriter and I am not. I did write probably a quarter of their songs, but I would give Hunter the lion's share of the credit. I think other people see things in my songs that I don't see. You can't be responsible for what's really there in your work in a way, nor is it any of your business what someone else makes of it. I don't think they are terribly good, myself.

DK: Is there one song that you wrote for the Dead are you most proud of?

JB: I don't think it's appropriate to take pride in that stuff in the first place because I think that the good stuff is given to you, it

just shows up, and you can be proud of the fact that you were capable of getting out of the way of it, or proud of the fact that the holy spirit decided to give it to you. How often I have wondered why God in its wisdom decided to give it to Bob Dylan not his far more worthy servant me. I really feel like for me to take pride in my songs would be like the faucet taking pride for the water.

DK: Do you have optimism that courts will soon strike down the Digital Millennium Copyright Act?

JB: I think it will have to be basically torn apart piece by piece, which is why we have been doing hacking away at its various limbs. But eventually it will become manifestly obvious that it's simply impractical to the creation of new technology that open systems are inherently more powerful than closed systems are, and the DMCA closes a lot of systems. First you get a broad popular disagreement with a point of the law, and in general an unwillingness to obey it, and gradually then the community who regulates the law comes around and recognizes it's not practical to go on keeping it.

DK: Can you talk about being arrested at the San Francisco Airport for having small amount of marijuana in your bag?

JB: I was coming back from Burning Man heading to New York and had a small bottle of Advil in the bottom of my suitcase and had enough marijuana in it to roll two or three joints and enough mushrooms to get high with a friend, not exactly commercial distribution. Because of the Patriot Act, they asserted the right to search my bag, even though it had been checked. Unless you turn that into a general warrant, which is forbidden by the Constitution, all they were allowed to search for was something that could endanger the aircraft from the baggage compartment which would be an explosive, there really only allowed search for explosives. They were claiming that in the course of trying to find explosives they found something else, that they had the right to bust me for that. They opened up the Advil bottle smelled

the pot and drag me off the plane and treated me like a terrorist for a day. It was unbelievable even cavity searches. I was handcuffed to a rail downstairs at SFO for about five hours and then taken to the Redwood City jail and placed in conditions that made it really difficult to even inform anybody that I had been arrested.

I thought this can't be right, this is not constitutional. So I took to court and I was ready to take it all the way to the Supreme Court. Fortunately I didn't really have to because they simply just changed their policy. They recognized at a certain point in the process that they were really screwing up. I was one of the last people to be arrested that way.

DK: It brings up an important point about liberty

JB: Liberty lies in its exercise, the willingness of people to defend it by their own actions. The problem with freedom in America is that people are scared, hesitant to declare their actual own rights and hesitant to act like free people. There is a lot in the system that makes it difficult to even think like a free person. The public education system is so good at crushing your sense of liberties you hardly need the law.

DK: How has the Internet changed American politics?

JB: By making it possible to create a successful political campaign without becoming completely dependent upon the fat cats, that has fundamentally changes American politics. In 1998, in 10 out of 11 congressional races, the election was won by the guy that had the biggest war chest. It was just about money, it didn't have to do with who is right or wrong, it had to do with who had the biggest amount of money and that's still kind of true, but the way in which you raise that money has changed, and moreover will change as a lot of the mass media wither, because what do you spend that money on? Advertising and mass media. If you can produce Youtube videos that are

just as effective if not more so for free, why would you spend money on TV advertising? No one is going to be watching television. That changes American politics a lot.

There are ways in which I think it may change American politics for the worse in the sense that everybody in Congress is going to get such a flood of well-informed comments from people that it's going to further reduce their attention span which is already generally shorter than an elevator ride. They're going to go into glassy eyed data shock. But the Internet also makes it possible for the entire populace to be analyzing these incredibly complex laws. You can't have an informed people with the news media that exist today. All the media do is to reaffirm the superstitions and prejudices of the masses. If you're actually trying to say something that is true and new, you can't get it through Fox. You can't even get it through PBS.

DK: What you think of future of the global economy is?

JB: There will be one. The economy was always global. As communications increase the perceptual distance between the market and the maker becomes more of a direct relationship. Your location doesn't matter so much except in terms of transportation costs and those are becoming less and less critical because technology creates ways of getting stuff around that is increasingly efficient.

The economy becomes more and more of a solid whole around the face of the earth and wealth is getting spread around much more equitably. There's still what's called the power law which is information, attention breeds attention. There will always be these cyclonic attractors of attention that both generate and receive an awful lot of it. But they will rise and fall much more quickly than they used to.

Corporations in general are not as long-lived as people think of them as being. People think of corporations as living longer than humans, they generally don't. They generally live a life span that is shorter

than human life, and that will become even more the case. Monopoly forms quickly in cyberspace but it dissolves quickly. There was a time that I can remember pretty vividly where about 85% of the computers in the world were dedicated Word Perfect machines. The only people who use Word Perfect are lawyers, and I don't know what they're going to do. Word Perfect is basically dead.

DK: Is cyberspace naturally anti sovereign?

JB: I think so. People like to laugh at the declaration of Independence of cyberspace but I still think despite the various efforts of governments around the planet to assert certain control over areas of cyberspace I don't think they been terribly successful. They have been more successful than I expected them to be but not very much. As we've seen in Iran, they practically shut down the Internet and people were still coming up with ways to get information out to twitter and upload videos to Youtube, despite all the best efforts of the government of Iran to make sure that didn't happen.

Information has this incredibly solvent quality. It can make almost any boundary porous. There's some believe in the United States that China has somehow erected a great wall that works. But if you go to China you don't see much evidence of it if that's the case.

DK: What your sense of Burning Man's influence on culture?

JB: Burning Man has had a pretty significant influence on the culture of the counterculture. Burning Man is basically a delightful opportunity for people with a sense of irony to think dark thoughts about what happens with anarchy. The thing about anarchy is that it is naturally inclined over time to turn into the most elaborate and autocratic bureaucracy.

The people who were sort of the leaders of the anarchy, the old boy network that is always inside of every group, are determined not to be

autocratic or regulatory, so they refuse to give guided authority, which creates this vacuum of things that have to be dealt with, a common methods for dealing with issues avenues of appeal things like that and into that vacuum rush all these former hall monitors who become petty tyrants of the Department of Mutant Vehicles or whatever it is and become highly regulatory and that's what happened there.

I have been wanted to create something new: Exploding Man which is much more of a guerrilla art movement, and rush into a place where you don't have to have a permit from the BLM or anybody. Build a man really quick and blow him up and get the hell out of there! I wouldn't mind doing it in Times Square.

DK: Do you recall the time we were together on our bikes shutting down Times Square during the Republican National Convention in 2004?

JB: I remember that ride. That was a wonderful moment cascading down Broadway with those 5000 bicycles, it was great. I had my dance mobs going on, that's my idea of guerrilla art!

DK: Describe your dance mobs.

JB: We did a bunch of them at the 2004 Republican convention in New York, they were quite successful. We'd gather together about 20 or 30 people who with a change of attire and a haircut could look like Republicans. We had a schedule of all the major Republican events and we would sort of salt our people around in the crowd as people were coming and going at these events. After a certain signal, we would all start dancing like crazy. This really unnerved them. It was a form of protest but it was so obscure. We were not harming anybody. They couldn't have us arrested for dancing. It wasn't something to put on television and get more Republican votes.